3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzhq



### 6. *Akhyò Zoshàn*

The Abkhasians ascribe diseases generally to supernatural influences or gods, but some diseases have their own special gods. The god of small-pox, for example, is *Akhyò Zoshàn* (the golden Zoskhan), and also his consort, the goddess *Khania Shkwàkwa* (Khania the white). How important are the gods of the Abkhasians may be judged from the following circumstance which took place during the spring of 1914 in one of the settlements of the village Jgerdi. Throughout the winter and spring of the year Abkhasia was in the grip of a severe epidemic of small-pox. In order to check the spread of the disease vaccinators were sent to the affected areas. The following account of what happened was described to me by P. Janashia, one of the vaccinators. A certain settlement, fearing that the gods might wreak vengeance upon them, refused to admit the vaccinators; they preferred to safeguard themselves against this terrible disease, *atswarp'shdzà* (small-pox), by the adoption of the gods. *Atswà* denotes skin, rind, and *ap'shdzà*, pretty, beautiful; the whole, in translation, denoting " that which decorates (beautifies) the skin ".

By pooling their resources, the settlement raised enough money to buy a couple of snow-white goats and a sufficiency of provisions, and made an expedition into the forest. Here, amidst the quietude and peace of over-hanging leaves, a sumptuous feast was prepared for the divine guests. When everything was ready, and the victim had been placed, according to custom, on *ashwamkyadà'*, the head of the settlement said the prayer and made the offering to the gods. Nearby stood two bedsteads, adorned with silk bedclothes, on which sat two young women, an *aznauri* and a peasant woman; their naked breasts were covered with silk handkerchiefs. The whole assembly knelt down, while the head of the settlement implored the gods to accept their offering by kissing the breasts of the most beautiful women of the settlement, and thus become, in accordance with the ancestral custom, adopted sons of the settlement. Near the " foster-mothers of gods " stood two of the finest horses, one with a side saddle. The sumptuous feast followed the ceremony of adoption, and afterwards the people, holding the horses by the bridle, on which were to be riding the newly adopted gods, *Akhyò Zoshàn* and *Khania Shkwàkwa*, escorted the precious guests to the accompaniment of song, far away from the settlement. Thus they " turned away ", or warded off, the small-pox.

" You may not believe it," an Abkhaz from the settlement told me, " but this ' adoption ' saved us from the small-pox; not one of us fell a victim to it. You, the learned, have caused our ruin by bringing down upon us the anger of the gods of our fathers," he concluded, with a deep sigh.